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A Framework for Prophecy

Prophecy holds great fascination for many students of the Christian Scriptures. Miles of words have, over the centuries, been penned in an attempt to fathom its mysteries. Any attempt to understand it is like assembling a complex jigsaw puzzle. And like a jigsaw puzzle, there are basic rules for success.

by James McBride

Perhaps the prime step, in our jigsaw analogy, is to pick out the edges and corners. And it is almost a necessity to have before us a full-colour picture of the end result. Prophecy is like that.

The "edges and corners" of prophecy, and the "picture," have been provided for us by the Creator. The annual holy convocations detailed for ancient Israel, properly understood, are the frame from which we glimpse the broad outline of prophecy. This is especially so in regard to annual convocations held in the autumn. These four convocations outline events to occur at "the end of the age" and carry us through to the glorious end purpose devised by God for mankind.

Divine Origin

It's a common fallacy to assume that these annual "meetings" (they are listed in Leviticus 23) were devised by Moses, and that they are simply "for Jews" and of no significance for Christians.

Not so: "*And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, The set feasts of Jehovah, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my set feasts*" (Leviticus 23:1-2). These age-old festivals, notice, are "*the set feasts of Jehovah.*" There are indications in the Scriptures that they were introduced by the Creator from the beginnings of human history.

It also comes as a surprise to many Christians to learn that they continued to be observed annually by the first Christians - both Jew and Gentile. Paul, for example, notes (I Corinthians 5) that the largely Gentile Corinthian brethren were, at the time of his writing to

them, observing the spring festival of *Unleavened Bread*. Indeed, many books have been written explaining their application within Christianity. As the centuries rolled by, heathen practices swamped their observance, and are, today, widespread within Christianity - annual practices now known as Easter, Christmas, All Hallows and various "saints days" and the weekly Sunday. None of these have Scriptural authority for their observance. They are a smokescreen that obliterates the divine plan.

Harvest Festivals

The beginning of the festival year is in early spring. The festivals follow the harvest seasons. They begin with the well-known *Passover* - a term which, by convention, includes both the Passover sacrifice and the following seven days (called *Unleavened Bread*) when "*no leaven [i.e. raising agents, yeasted products] shall be in all your dwellings.*" It was the beginning of the agricultural year, and initiated the early harvest in Palestine.

This "firstfruits" harvest of barley and wheat continued for seven weeks, and was celebrated in the early summer festival of the *Feast of Weeks* - also called *Pentecost*, a name familiar to practicing Christians from the events recorded in Acts 2. We have covered their significance for the divine plan elsewhere - e.g. in the *Bible Basics* study course. There are, of course, other crops, and autumn sees the harvesting of various fruits. It is to these autumn festivals we now turn.

The calendar used in Israel - and indeed one that was widely used anciently in the Middle East - was based

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in part on the phases of the moon. The first month of the year on that calendar is, logically enough, in the spring. The seventh month falls in autumn, and the first of the autumnal festivals is on the first day of that month (it is called *Tishri*). It is called the *Day of Trumpets* from the practice of the blowing of trumpets on that day. The apostle John, in the book of Revelation, relays Jesus' take on this. He unveils to John events at the end time as a series of seven "seals" and "trumpets" (*ch 5ff*). It is a time of terrible failed harvests which result in famine, disease and widespread death (*ch 6:5-6*).

As each angelic "trumpet" is sounded, it heralds the unfolding of an awesome mix of man-made and divinely inflicted consequences on Earth. There are seven of these trumpets; the "*last trumpet*" being the resurrection of Christians and the return of Jesus to reign a thousand years. Recall the prophecy of Paul: "*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). To the Colossian brethren he wrote: "*When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall you also with him be manifested in glory*" (Colossians 3:4).

[Request the free booklet **Key to the Book of Revelation** for a more detailed exposition of that prophetic era]

Reconciled to God

The message of the *Day of Trumpets* is a sober warning of the consequences of human disobedience and rejection of our Creator. The following ten days (on the calendar) are a time of reflection leading to the solemnity of the next holy convocation - the *Day of Atonement*. It is the most solemn holy day on the divine calendar. As with all the festivals, it reflects the life and ministry of Jesus. For Israel, it was the annual ceremony by which the nation was reconciled to God, their individual and collective sin forgiven. Prophetically, it refers to the time - yet future - when the remnant of the two scattered Houses of Israel will return together to the Land of Promise, this time led by the returning Redeemer and Saviour, Jesus. They will come rejoicing - cleansed and forgiven - not by temporary sacrifices and ceremonies, but by the shed blood of Jesus, the divine Law implanted in their minds through the indwelling Spirit.

A sub-set of *Atonement* is seen by some Bible students

as having reference to a major event that takes place at that time: "*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time*" (Revelation 20:1-5). It signals the beginning of the thousand-year reign of Jesus, with mankind freed from the influence of Satan and his evil angels. All mankind will be free to be reconciled to God.

Universal Peace

Events move on, and the next festival - beginning on the 15th of the seventh month - lasts for seven days. It's called the *Feast of Tabernacles*. [A *tabernacle* is a tent or booth, a temporary dwelling.] *Tabernacles* was celebrated in Israel in remembrance of their wanderings in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, during which time - forty years - they lived in tents. The prophet Zechariah tells us that this festival will, after Christ's return, be celebrated by all mankind - Jew and Gentile (*ch 14: 16-19*). Comments by the apostles Peter and Paul add to the symbolism showing that our bodies are "*tabernacles*" - temporary dwellings. In sum, the festival reminds us that since Adam everything is material and temporary.

Tabernacles has special reference to the reign on Earth of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords - supreme in Government and in Faith. During that millennial reign, mankind will continue to be born, live and die. Under the reign of Jesus and the saints - resurrected at his coming - there will be universal peace. All nations will look to Jerusalem for guidance on their legal systems, and Jesus is the Supreme Judge. The prophet Isaiah wrote: "*The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up*

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sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:1-4)

The *weekly Sabbath*, too, has implications for prophecy. It has been a long-held concept that the seven days of the week represent God’s plan for us. There will be six “days” - each representing a thousand years - during which man is left largely to his own devices. Then will follow a “day of rest” - also a thousand years - under the reign of Messiah. It is a reminder that our time on Earth is limited, and that God is Sovereign. This present phase of our existence is just temporary.

A General Resurrection

There’s one more festival day - immediately following the seven days of *Tabernacles*. This “*eighth day*” is prophetic of the culmination, the completion, of God’s grand design. It marks a new beginning. (The number “eight,” throughout Scripture, symbolizes this.)

The final two chapters of the book of Revelation inform us of a “*new heavens and a new earth.*” Writes the apostle Peter: “*Then all these being about to be dissolved, of what sort ought you to be in holy behavior and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the Day of God, through which the heavens having been set afire will be dissolved; and burning, the elements will melt? But according to His promise, we look for “new heavens and a new earth,” in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:11-13 LITV).*

The last day of *Tabernacles* - called “*the great day of the feast*” (John 7:37) - is prophetic of the years following the Millennium. Satan is released at this time to once again roam our planet, deceiving mankind and luring them into a grand coalition against Jesus and his regime (Revelation 20:7-10). He is defeated and removed forever from influencing mankind. Those who join him in this rebellion, having experienced at first hand the perfect rulership of Messiah, will be judged by fire, having lost their chance to live eternally (Revelation 20:9).

This “*last day*” represents the time of the “*white throne judgment*” (vv.11-15). Then, all mankind who have not

in this life responded to the invitation to eternal life will be resurrected in their flesh for a period of testing during which they are judged according the “*the books*” - the Scriptures. Then comes the end.

The End of Time

It’s a time when everyone on the planet will no longer be flesh and blood but will be eternal spirit, to die no more. The Father - for the first time ever - will dwell on Earth in person. There will be no more pain, no sorrow, no more death:

“And I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God with men! And He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no longer, nor mourning, nor outcry, nor will there be pain any more; for the first things passed away. And the One sitting on the throne said, Behold! I make all things new. And He says to me, Write, because these Words are faithful and true. And He said to me, It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending. To the one thirsting, I will freely give of the fountain of the Water of Life. The one overcoming will inherit all things, and I will be God to him, and he will be the son to Me” (Revelation 21:3-7 LITV)

A Time To Observe

These festivals - instituted to be observed by all mankind and not just by Jews - provide insight into the magnificent plan God has for mankind - a plan determined “before the world began.”

Bible believers around the world continue to observe the festivals. For details of when and where, contact any of our offices.

(All Scripture references are ASV unless otherwise noted.)

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